

Uniform System of Education for Pakistan: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract: Education is a channel for modifying society to suit the changing scenario and facilitate human beings' adjustment at the individual, local, national, and international levels. As a developing country, Pakistan has introduced various reforms in the education sector, but evident gaps in fulfilling the minimum quality standards still remain. Furthermore, the COVID-19 scenario served as a challenging global alarm for significant changes, specifically in education. Thus, the demand for relevant quality education is alarming today. This study has been conducted to analyze various education policies and reforms in Pakistan since 1947, to describe the opportunities and challenges of educational reforms in the country, and to explore the current reforms aimed at establishing a uniform education system. Therefore, the researcher studied all the educational policies regarding their allocation procedure for human and financial resources. This research also examines the functioning of such reforms, taking into account Pakistan's socio-economic context. This literature-based study consulted the available literature on educational policies and reforms in Pakistan. Three-stage thematic methods were applied for this purpose.

Key Words: Education, Modification, Policies and Reforms, Global Environment, Socioeconomic Background

Introduction

Knowledge is among the key aspects that give humans superiority over other creations of Allah Almighty. Learning through formal, informal, and non-formal educational means is the foundation of all experiences. Generally speaking, the key challenges that appear unnoticed require urgent solutions. Pakistan's teaching-learning environment remains in a state of hopelessness, failing to introduce a fair, uniform, and standardized education system nationwide. We observe three types of education systems, i.e., English medium, Urdu medium, and Madrasa education. However, the controversial link among these systems categorizes the community, offering little prospect for human equity throughout the region (Imran, 2017).

As an emerging country, Pakistan has been attempting to implement educational policies to achieve 100% literacy since its independence, but it struggles with numerous issues. At various levels, development reforms were formulated to enhance the critical education sector; however, no policy was effectively enforced nationwide (Sajid, 2016). Furthermore, some analysts suggest that a uniform curriculum throughout the country, as well as an assessment and evaluation of the madrasa system and steps for measuring the allocation of human and financial resources in the education sector, are essential (Ball, 1994).

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However, keeping in view the socio-economic background of Pakistan, the uniform curriculum is another rising issue, and more debates have been brought into action for this alarming issue. Generally speaking, Pakistan is a multicultural and religious country. There is a better solution than just assessing the madrasa system alone. This country essentially needs such a curriculum that may fulfil the religious, ethnic, and socio-economic needs of Pakistan. Imran (2017) highlighted inequality on the part of the superior, middle, and lower classes as the leading cause behind the poor education system in Pakistan.

The study will make a significant contribution to the field of education. The study results will inform policymakers, educators, and students about the challenges faced by the current government in developing a uniform education system in Pakistan. Furthermore, this study is beneficial for learners interested in discourse analysis, as it provides data on social and political philosophy, with a particular focus on educational reforms and the uniform education system in Pakistan.

This study was conducted to analyze the factors that hinder Pakistan's uniform standard education system. Moreover, the study considered the suggested reforms for a uniform education system in Pakistan. The research objectives were to analyze various education policies and reforms in Pakistan since 1947, describe the opportunities and obstacles to educational reforms in Pakistan, and explore the current reforms aimed at establishing a uniform education system in Pakistan.

Literature Review

This section discusses educational policies from 1947 to the present, with particular reference to their merits, demerits, consequences, and the allocation process of financial resources. It also deals with the policy of a uniform education system for Pakistan. Subsequently, other central perspectives discussed in this section were inequality, quality, and uniformity in education. However, democratic, critical, and engaged pedagogy lenses were also part of this section to link this concept with a philosophical perspective, which provides a solid theoretical framework for this study.

National Education Policies in Pakistan

The National Education Conference of 1947, held under the presidency of Quaid-e-Azam, the great leader, marked the first attempt to establish a baseline for Pakistan's education system. This conference mainly focused on imparting scientific and technical education, Islamic ideology, religious teachings, and physical and military practices. Likewise, numerous committees were established to implement the education reforms. This conference also highlighted the quality and mandatory schooling in Pakistan, pairing it with Islamic Principles, women's education, and other related topics. Unfortunately, owing to numerous factors, including rising numbers of refugees and other logistical difficulties of the newborn nation and the British colonial regime, this strategy could not be fully enforced. Similarly, the recommendations of the education conference (1959) were also valuable, as this conference covered some important areas of higher, professional, military, and religious education. Special, madrasa, and maktab education, as well as the importance of equality in education, were also discussed. However, due to limited resources, the conference's recommendations were only included in the document. Similarly, the same recommendations were discussed in 1970. However, the military issues, such as the division of Pakistan into east and west wings as well as the dissolution of the government of Yahya (Dildar et al., 2016) in Pakistan, did not allow for the implementation of these recommendations (Sajid, 2016). Furthermore, financial obstacles hindered the implementation of all the previous policies. Similar to the dissolution of the previous government, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took charge as the new ruler in 1972. So, a new policy was issued, and the previous one still needs to be implemented (Dildar et al., 2016).

Salient Features of the National Education Policies in Pakistan

National Education Policy (1979)

Salient Features: This policy focused on the "Islamization" of the school system and proposed a curriculum more in line with territorial purposes. Similarly, it guaranteed to increase the literacy levels and eliminate the educational

superiority of the elite. Uniformity was focused. Urdu was recommended as the medium of instruction for all the English and Urdu-medium schools. Madaris and mosque schools were recognized.

Furthermore, the government's commitment to "the goal of universal elementary education" was also reinforced in the 1970 Education Policy, which accepted it as a "basic principle of State Policy" in the 1956 and 1962 Constitutions, as well as in "the Karachi Policy of 1960 (which) introduced... compulsory, universal, and free primary education as a target for 1980" (Report of the Committee on Education Sector Reforms in Pakistan, [2020](#); (Bengali, [1999](#)).

National Education Policy (1992)

Salient Features: Similarly, this policy focused on achieving universal primary education and made recommendations for discouraging dropout rates. Moreover, it ensures the fulfillment of the main educational requirements. Likewise, the participation of private sector institutes was empowered. Like the previous policies, this policy also focused on women's education.

The policy recommendations also concerned increasing the efficiency of a substantial in-service teachers' education program. Other merits of this policy include modifying professional channels, introducing new courses (computer at the school level), reforming the exam scheme, and promoting community engagement (Report of the Committee on Education Sector Reforms in Pakistan, [2020](#)).

National Education Policy (1998)

Salient Features: In connection with the previous education policies in Pakistan, the main focus of the education policy of 1998 was on the elementary level, with the target being school entry for all children (6-12 years of age). Catchy classes were recommended. An effective assessment system and new facilities were recommended for the teachers as well as for the students. This policy also focused on ensuring quality, equality, and financial assistance at the elementary level (Report of the Committee on Education Sector Reforms in Pakistan, [2020](#)).

National Education Policy (2009)

Salient Features: The main aims of the National Education Policy 2009 were quality, accessibility, and applicability. The main targets were free primary and secondary level education for all. This policy also recommends allocating financial and human resources for universal free education. Other democratic characteristics of the recommendation of this policy were the elimination of social and gender injustice, development of a facilitating teaching-learning environment to achieve the EFA AND MDGs targets, focus on special education, setting national standards, introduction of an innovative teaching-learning environment, establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems, promoting research culture at the university level and encouraging engaged learning for fulfilling the aim of globalization (Report of the Committee on Education Sector Reforms in Pakistan, [2020](#)).

Draft National Education Policy (2017)

Salient Features: This draft was found to favor democratic, critical, and engaged learning. All the innovative teaching-learning aspects were favored, such as contents, teaching and evaluation methods, recruitment of creative staff, developing the culture of critical thinking through research, and providing experimental materials to children to enable them to participate in creative activities, demand an increase in the budget for education, free education, women empowerment, promoting relationship channel between private and government sector and quality education at primary level. Methods and measures were demanded for the applicability of the policy and for achieving the national and international goals. Furthermore, community participation was also recommended (Report of the Committee on Education Sector Reforms in Pakistan, [2020](#)).

Demerits and Results of the National Education Policies in Pakistan

All the educational policies and recommended steps are essential for quality and equality in education. However, demerits were found that such policies just collapsed due to social and political issues, and the natural disasters in Pakistan

also affected the implementation process. The consequences, however, differed from the expectations. While nine million children are not obtaining primary or secondary education, literacy levels could be higher. Pakistan failed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of offering free primary education by 2015 and is now struggling to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (International Crisis Group, [2014](#))

Regretfully, the education industry can only transform some of these programs and strategies. One key reason for this is that, along with many other considerations, the public sector is revisiting the field of education through playtesting. The current administration may opt to diverge from history and focus on emerging laws and regulations (Ramay, 2018).

The inequalities between girls and boys, as well as the discrepancies across villages and cities, are also significant issues. The joint national and provincial expenditure on education is relatively low in Asia, at 2 per cent of GDP (International Crisis Group, [2014](#)).

Quality Education

Quality education is Goal 4 of the SDGs, which are the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 4 of SDGs is a global goal that can be classified as "the free and equitable quality education for all girls, boys, and adults, the opportunity for all the individuals, interactive teaching-learning environment, enabling individuals for critical thinking, creating and fulfilling innovative methods, assisting all the learners irrespective of colour, race, and religion, free primary and secondary education for all, producing skilful persons, researcher, and critical teachers, availability, and accessibility of the modern technologies to all, research and other scholarships in higher education and elimination of differences at all the level concerning age, gender, society, and economy, etc. (The Global Goals, [2025](#)).

Likewise, quality education ensures that everyone has a high-quality education and encourages lifelong learning. Education is the basis for achieving many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). People can overcome the cycle of poverty if they can obtain a good education. As a result, education plays a crucial role in reducing inequities and promoting gender equality. It also enables individuals worldwide to live healthier and more secure lifestyles. Education is also essential in building global tolerance and contributing to a more peaceful society (2022). Retrieved January 9, 2022, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-4.pdf>.

Under the excellent leadership of Quaid-i-Azam, Pakistan was established in the name of Islam. Education was given a high priority in the Quran. Despite the Quran's and Quaid's preachings, as well as worldwide experience with education that encouraged rapid economic growth, Pakistan's planners continued to underfund education, particularly primary education. Furthermore, the funds granted could have been spent more effectively. As we approach the new millennium, we must turn to the high road of education, knowledge, learning, the sciences, and technology. We are in the midst of a knowledge transformation. Pakistan can only join the exclusive club of developed nations through education at all levels, particularly technical education (Khan & Mahmood, [1997](#))

Standardized System of Education for Pakistan

The present government has worked to bring a standard education system to the country. The Prime Minister has stated that having a standardized educational system throughout Pakistan is a priority. He incorporated uniformity as the central issue in the country's educational sector. Moreover, the task was assigned to the Minister of Education, and further steps were taken based on the recommendations. Uniformity is standardization; more often, this means the "level," as the people of Pakistan still lack 21st-century standards. However, this standardization and skilling may counter the concept of encouraging children to grow their capabilities thoroughly. The concept of 'standardization' is always about providing a context that supports all those who fall below (Bari, [2018](#)).

The SDGs targets were claimed to be achieved by 2020 and 2030, but as the COVID-19 virus spread worldwide in 2020, most countries declared emergency school closures, affecting more than 91% of pupils globally. As of April 2020, approximately 1.6 billion children and teenagers were out of school (UNWE, [2021](#)).

Correspondingly, various studies have reported on the quality, access, and equity at the school level during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pakistan was already a struggling country in achieving the target of universal education. It was reported that 22.8 million children aged 5-16 are out of school. The mandatory closure of schools affected the teaching



and learning process, which further led to a disparity gap. Many parents reported that they have no access to the Internet, while others have this chance. So, the dropout rate was also reported during this emergency. However, the government fulfils its role in addressing the challenges. However, the responses were reported as mental disturbance, financial challenges, poor internet signals, and inequality. Pakistan is already facing issues related to universal, quality, and equitable education. This system also encompasses public and private sectors, as well as cultural and linguistic issues (Mian & Chachar, [2020](#)).

Another study conducted to explore emergency remote teaching in three developing countries — Afghanistan, Palestine, and Libya — found challenges to quality, access, and equity during the COVID-19 pandemic. During semi-structured interviews, the students identified challenges in the teaching-learning environment, including digital teaching inequality, the quality of teaching content, and a lack of respect for digital privacy. Adverse effects on students' learning were reported. The governments took steps, but negative results were reported (Khlaif & Salha, [2020](#)).

Similarly, the Pakistani government responded to the challenges, with the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training releasing a nationwide education response and resilience strategy (K-12) in response to COVID-19. Different virtual instructional channels were used to achieve the academic goals of Sustainable Development 4 throughout the pandemic; the government began delivering instructional information to K-12 students through Tele School. Similarly, an informative television program was launched, beginning its broadcast in April. The program's theme was "education at home," and it seeks to deliver instruction for classes from one to twelve via a set schedule. The transmission runs from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., with 30-minute periods for every class (Mian & Chachar, [2020](#)).

Democratic and Critical Engaged Philosophy

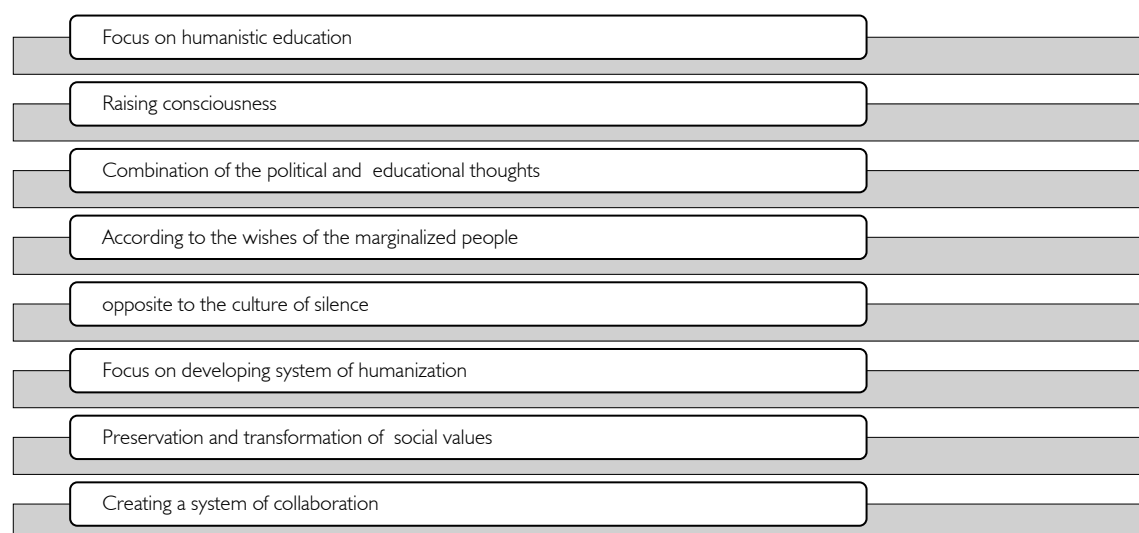
Uniformity, equality, and education for all are the slogans of the social-political philosophy. This philosophy led to a democratic, participatory perspective, and John Dewey strongly supported such a philosophy. He supports equal educational opportunities for all and provides the foundation for learner-centred education (Williams, [2017](#)).

Moreover, Freire supported engaged and critical pedagogy, providing strong notions for an interactive, equal, and facilitating teaching-learning environment. He argues for the curiosity of teachers and learners. Equality-based education was his primary motive (Hooks, [1994](#)).

We adored reading the book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" by Paulo Freire. The book presented a distinct theory regarding education. Freire theorized educational aspects more comprehensively. After analyzing various critical reviews of the pedagogy of the oppressed, the researcher has arrived at the point of presenting a visual representation of his theory. Therefore, a further description will be easier to grasp.

Figure 1

Freire Theorized Pedagogy of the Oppressed Strategically ("Pedagogy of the Oppressed Paulo Freire," 1996)



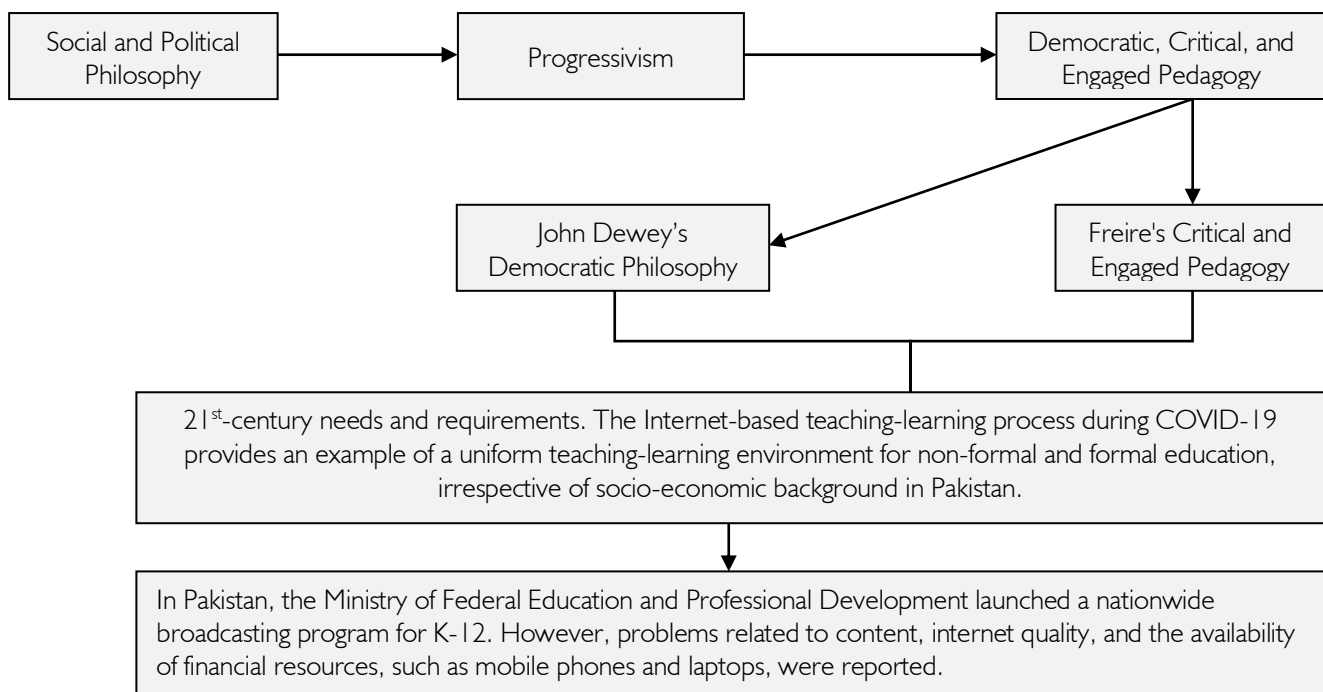
Application of the Critical and Democratic Pedagogy in Pakistan during COVID-19

Consequently, 21st-century needs and requirements are leading toward uniformity. In this regard, Dewey's and Freire's educational concepts may be more fitting. Furthermore, we currently observe the application of democratic and critical pedagogies. The based teaching-learning process during COVID-19 provides an example of a uniform teaching-learning environment for Pakistan's non-formal and formal education, irrespective of socioeconomic background. Besides this connection, political and social philosophies were applied in which the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training released a nationwide response to COVID-19 as an "Education response and resilience strategy (K-12).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework (Noddings, 1995; Sinha, 1995; Creswell, 2009)



Methods

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research approach and utilized a literature-based procedure. We followed the study conducted by Zai and Akhunzada (2020) for the thematic method.

Furthermore, we employed various methods of literature review. First, we followed scoping reviews of the literature. In this sequence, we examine the extent, range, and nature of the uniform education system. Similarly, this type of review provides for research gaps. Additionally, based on a critical review, we studied the literature to reflect on educational policies from a philosophical lens. Then, we used the thematic method to interpret our results. Finally, we identified opportunities and obstacles and then forwarded recommendations (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017).

Sources for Data Collection

Data related to educational policies and reforms in Pakistan were collected from the literature. All available books and internet sources were used for this purpose (Shams, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed employing a theme-based procedure. All the literature was reviewed to identify themes, and then results were drawn from these themes (Shams, 2018).

Results

The following themes were derived from the literature. All the themes described the educational policies since 1947. Themes I, II, III, IV, and V achieved objective 2, in which opportunities and obstacles were described in terms of merits and hurdles. Similarly, theme VI achieved objective 3.

Theme I: Results of the Policies

All the educational policies were found to need more implementation due to political or internal issues. Still, the targets are expected to be accomplished in the future.

Theme II: Merits of National Education Policies in Pakistan

In light of the literature, it was found that all national education policies in Pakistan aim to achieve a better future through an improved education system. As we can notice, all the education policies in Pakistan provide recommendations for equality-based education. Women's education for "special people" was another focus of the educational policies in Pakistan. Some educational policies presented choices for the medium of instruction, keeping in account Pakistan's socio-economic background. Likewise, religious education was also a focus of various educational policies in Pakistan. Moreover, the educational policies of Pakistan also give priority to science, technical, and vocational education. All national education policies are aligned with constitutional provisions and the SDGs, EFA, and education for all in theory; however, this alignment is not consistently observed in practice.

Theme III: Issues and Hurdles Block the Way

The primary reasons for the blockage of educational reforms were the country's internal issues, which hindered the system's progress. Such issues included social, political, and natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, and poor infrastructure conditions. Pakistan is facing the issue of culturalism. Different provinces have their own distinct identities and cultures. This also leads to blocking government ways. So, our policies failed to achieve universal education in the country.

Theme IV: Lack of Financial and Human Resources

Another theme was the need for more financial and human resources in Pakistan. All governments strive to propose educational reforms and enable their countries to cope with global issues. However, more financial resources are needed, as we are eyewitnesses to the budget allocation concerning education. Likewise, human resources need to be reported more. Teachers' training programs were proposed, but skilled humans could not manage and administer the system.

Similarly, this issue impacted the teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic when the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Development proposed and launched a program. However, reports were found to be harmful due to financial and human issues in the country. Specifically, students in remote areas faced this issue.

Theme V: Socioeconomic Background of Pakistan

Pakistan is a developing country comprising the superior, middle, and poor classes. Likewise, the education system also represents these three classes in the form of the elite (private) education sector, the government sector, and the religious madrasa system. This situation creates a complex dynamic of superiority and inferiority within the country. The children of the elite class receive international-level English-medium instruction, and comparatively, our policies always offer the medium according to the country's socioeconomic background. Moreover, the madrasa system has no concept of English, and the elite class is unfamiliar with Arabic or religious matters. So, the people of Pakistan among themselves are sick people of such a system and do not ever accept one another. So, a gap has been created, which further leads to inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and religion.

Theme VI: Positive Outlook Required for Fulfilling the Global Standards

Results were found for a uniform education system in Pakistan. A uniform system encompasses not only uniformity in the curriculum but also assistance for those at the lowest level of the economy or with other specific needs. However,

a uniform system was found among Goal 4 of the SDGs, which provides for a democratic, interactive, participative, and critical teaching-learning environment. A positive outlook was a theme that can fulfil global needs.

Conclusions

Based on the results, it is concluded that a positive outlook is essential for coping with global changes in the 21st century at the individual, national, and international levels. We already have the baseline in the form of policies, but still need cooperation, sincerity, and valuing others as part of the nation. Thus, in this way, the 21st century demands education for all, free education without any distinction, access, equality, and active participation with a critical and innovative approach, as embodied in the slogan and policy statement "Uniform education system for Pakistan."

Recommendations

1. The administration must focus on the commercial school network and the separate democratic and societal actions. Democratic and critical pedagogies were observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the results were negative. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Development has launched a uniform broadcast program for online teaching and learning. In this regard, the government initiative was democratic, but other issues were not addressed. For example, students in remote areas who faced financial difficulties were found to be affected. Uniformity was applied under this philosophical lens, and the government supported the online teaching and learning process for all.
2. Furthermore, we must connect such concepts throughout the educational setup to achieve the best results under Dewey's and Freire's democratic and critical pedagogy. We may need to remove the issues of inequality and provide equal opportunities irrespective of colour, race, and culture. The Ministry of Federal recommends conducting this literature-based thematic review through a mixed-methods research design so that quantification will lead to a better understanding of the qualitative data. Professional development must initiate programs that provide equal opportunities to all students irrespective of age, culture, race, and financial position.
3. The government already has various goals and procedures, but it needs financial tools and realistic measures to achieve them.
4. English should be used as an instructional tool at all levels, as it is now an international language for communication. The Madrasa and government education systems must be aligned, especially with the targeted goals of global demands.

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